

Tsakatika, M. (2016) SYRIZA'S electoral rise in Greece: protest, trust and the art of political manipulation. *South European Society and Politics*, (doi:[10.1080/13608746.2016.1239671](https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2016.1239671))

This is the author's final accepted version.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/128645/>

Deposited on: 20 September 2016

# **SYRIZA's electoral rise in Greece: protest, trust and the art of political manipulation**

## **Abstract**

Between 2010 and 2015, a period of significant political change in Greece, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), a minor party, achieved and consolidated major party status. This article explores the role of political strategy in SYRIZA's electoral success. It argues that contrary to accepted wisdom, targeting a 'niche' constituency or protesting against the establishment will not suffice for a minor party to make an electoral breakthrough. SYRIZA's case demonstrates that unless a minor party is ready to claim that it is willing and able to take on government responsibility, electoral advancement will not be forthcoming. The success of SYRIZA's strategy can be attributed to favourable electoral demand factors and apt heresthetic manipulation of issue dimensions.

**Keywords:** SYRIZA, Tsipras, Memorandum, minor parties, radical left, Greek party system, heresthetics

**Word count: 11,947**

From a party lifespan perspective (Pedersen 1982), over the course of the last half century a swathe of minor parties have managed to cross both the threshold of representation and that of relevance, meaning that they have become parties with an established presence in legislative politics as well as parties with coalition potential or 'blackmail' potential if in opposition (Sartori 1976). Contrary to expectations that minor parties of the Green, radical left, regionalist or far right party families would advance to the point that they would eventually reshape Europe's 'frozen' party systems (Webb 2005), by and large they have *remained* minor (Copus & al 2009). They remain, in Duverger's terms, 'merely makeweights' with marginal support, resources and capacity to influence public policy (Duverger 1964, p. 288).

The electoral trajectory of SYRIZA, the Greek Coalition of the Radical Left deviates from the aforementioned pattern. Before the economic crisis SYRIZA and its predecessor, Synaspismos, was a rooted (Bolleyer 2013) minor party that had achieved parliamentary representation since 1996 and had consolidated its electoral niche to a four per cent section of the vote on average by 2009. Less than three years later in the national elections of June

2012 SYRIZA achieved 26.6 per cent of the national vote and became the main party of opposition. In the national elections held just nine months later, in January 2015, SYRIZA became the main party of government capturing 36.3 per cent of the national vote. The case of SYRIZA can serve to illuminate the lesser known of the challenges that minor established parties such as Sinn Fein in Ireland, the Freedom Party of Austria and the French National Front face in becoming major parties. The case study of SYRIZA's electoral rise will demonstrate that minor parties face significant obstacles that concern the supply side, in particular, difficult choices concerning the political strategies open to them.

This article will focus on SYRIZA's political strategy over the course of one of the most turbulent periods in Modern Greek political history which resulted in the overhaul of Greece's party system with SYRIZA emerging as a major party. Between May 2010 and September 2015 SYRIZA moved from an '*issue ownership*' strategy, aimed at capturing an electoral niche, to a combined strategy of *protest*, aimed at mobilising the vote of the disaffected and *competence*, aimed at winning the vote of the majority. Such a strategy comprised, on the one hand, of an inclusive social-populist discourse (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014) and support for anti-austerity social movements, and on the other hand, a technocratic discourse that portrayed the left as a more credible and honest contender for government than its predecessors (Tsakatika 2014). SYRIZA's electoral success can be attributed to the fact that its choice of strategy constituted a more appropriate response to electoral demand when compared to the strategies its competitors as well as to the aptitude its leadership demonstrated in pursuing that strategy by engaging in heresthetic manipulation of issue dimensions (Riker 1986). The main argument will be that contrary to accepted wisdom, if a minor party aims to make an electoral breakthrough it will not suffice for it to claim 'ownership' of a niche issue or to appeal to the disaffected; it will need to claim the vote of the many asserting its will and ability to govern.

The first section of this article surveys the literature on the electoral success of minor parties and sets out the analytical framework. The second section examines the context within which SYRIZA's electoral rise took place in Greece over the 2010-2015 period. Drawing on four semi-structured interviews with the key party strategists of the time held in June 2016 and a number of party documents and speeches by the party's leader the following sections examine SYRIZA's strategy over the 2010-2015 period and the reasons behind its success. The conclusion summarises the argument and discusses the implications of the findings for the party literature.

## **Political strategy and the electoral success of minor parties**

Factors that work in favour of minor parties' electoral success are known to include institutional enablers such as low minimum requirements for parliament entry, enhanced proportionality of the electoral system and a high degree of state decentralisation (Lijphart 1994; Massetti & Schakel 2013) as well as certain demand side factors, such as changes in social values (Kitschelt 1988), anti-party sentiments when directed towards established parties (Belanger 2004), changes in public attitudes towards immigration (Norris 2005), and particularly in the case of left parties increasing unemployment, rising levels of Euroscepticism or a historical legacy of left support (March & Rommerskirchen 2014).

Going beyond the formal 'rules of the game' and the contours of electoral demand, a number of studies have pointed out the decisive importance of party agency in what concerns the strategies major parties adopt when they compete for votes with minor parties (Meguid 2005). Likewise, the strategies minor parties adopt to deal with the consequences of major parties' choices also matter greatly for electoral success. Minor parties, according to Norris (2005), have three strategic options in order to increase their share of the vote: they may compete with major parties on mainstream, competence issues (i.e. economy, security, etc) claiming that they would do a better job; they may protest against the record of major parties or they may claim the 'ownership' of issues that are not prioritised by major parties because they lie outside the 'zone of acquiescence'.

For Norris, the competence strategy is the least likely to succeed given the lack of expertise, lack of government experience and credibility of minor parties which does not militate in favour of convincing the median voter. In comparative perspective radical left parties (RLPs) have attempted to gain credibility by becoming junior government partners. This has generally not been an electorally successful strategy for them. In their study of European RLPs in government between 1990 and 2010 Olsen & al (2010, p. 182) demonstrate that where an RLP has entered a coalition government it has lost on average 25 per cent of its vote share. Major parties will tend to present government success as their own while minor parties struggle to demonstrate their positive and distinct contribution.

The protest strategy may be more promising for minor parties' electoral success but for Norris it is a risky strategy; the vote of the disaffected may be claimed by other parties as well. As noted already a decade ago, some RLPs will deploy social populist Manichean discourses in order to mobilise 'us', the pure people, versus 'them', the corrupt elites (March & Mudde 2004) in pursuit of electoral success. Parties such as Die Linke or the Dutch Socialist Party that have used left populist arguments have indeed had highly successful albeit volatile electoral performance (Keith & March 2015). Joint mobilisations with social movements and grassroots organisations are also important in RLPs' electoral strategies.

Both populist discourse and grassroots mobilisation are more effective when RLPs are in opposition (Tsakatika & Lisi 2013).

The best chances of electoral success for minor parties, in Norris' view, come from the strategy of claiming ownership of issue gaps left by major parties (Norris 2005, pp. 6-7). The aim of this strategy is to capture the votes of marginal, or 'niche', groups. RLPs have tried the 'issue ownership' strategy, particularly with issues such as defence of the welfare state (Olsen et al 2011), or the rights of precarious workers, young people or immigrants while in government as a junior partner or while in opposition, with varied electoral success. This is the 'safest' strategy, although it might be argued that it also has its weaknesses. For instance, if major parties perceive a growing threat they may decide to appropriate rather than accommodate the minor party's message (Bale 2003).

Insightful selection and seamless implementation of one or more of these strategies will not necessarily lead a minor political party to electoral success, given that such parties face fierce competition for electoral space by other parties with strategies of their own. Minor parties' strategic endeavours are particularly ridden with obstacles due to the very limited ability they have to determine the terrain upon which electoral competition is to take place compared to major parties. However all is not lost. Riker's concept of 'heresthetics' is useful here. 'Heresthetics' refers to a set of tactical manoeuvres which allow persistent 'losers' to be transformed into 'winners' in politics (Shepsle 2003). Heresthetics is about 'structuring the world so you can win' or striving to 'alter decisively the strategic context in which he or she finds him or herself so as to render it more amenable to strategies for realising his or her intentions' (Hay 2009, p. 276) by controlling agendas, strategic voting or manipulating issue-dimensionality (increasing or reducing the number of relevant issue dimensions) in public debate (McLean 2002). It is particularly the latter that politicians engage with more regularly. The heresthetic move that can be expected of a party that expects to lose an electoral contest would be that of modifying the number of salient issue dimensions (Riker 1986, pp. 1–9). On the contrary, a party that expects to win will strive to fix the number of existing salient issue dimensions and avoid the emergence of a new dimension that would divide the majority that the party commands (Riker 1986, pp. 66–76).

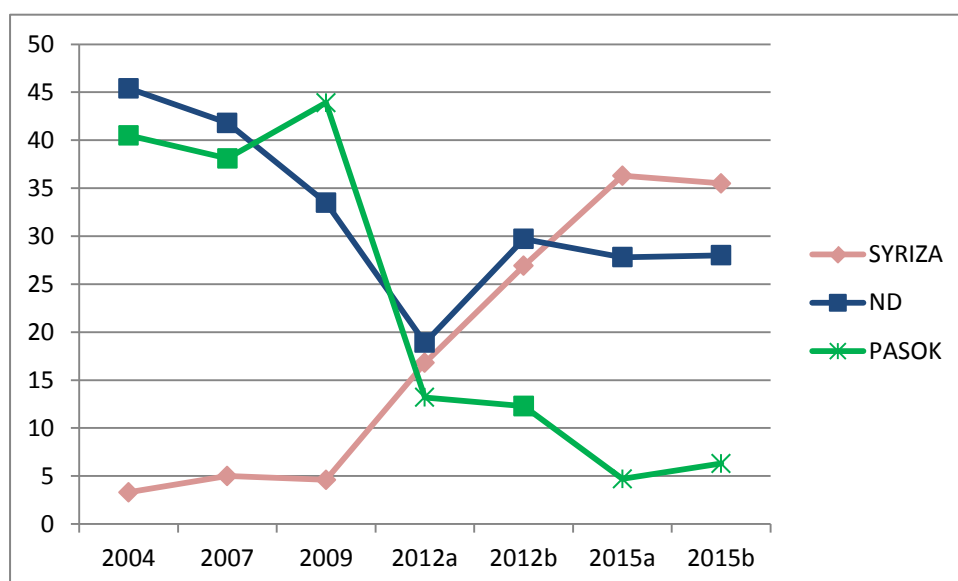
It will be shown that while SYRIZA and its minor party competitors faced the same institutional constraints, SYRIZA's electoral strategy was the winning one for two reasons. First, because its choice of strategy met demand side factors to a greater extent than the strategies of its minor competitors. Secondly, because using the manipulation of issue dimensions successfully SYRIZA laid the groundwork for its electoral strategy to bear fruit. In so doing, SYRIZA beat the odds, transforming itself from 'loser' to 'winner'.

## **SYRIZA's electoral rise: the context**

There is no denying that SYRIZA's electoral rise took place under exceptional circumstances. When PASOK [Panhellenic Socialist Movement - Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα] won the 2009 national elections by a landslide, the extent of the vulnerability of the Greek economy to the global economic crisis was not widely perceived. The announcement of upwards revised figures of the Greek public deficit by the incoming Minister of Finance initiated a confidence crisis in the Greek economy, one that led to the country's inability to finance its public debt through borrowing from international financial markets. The government requested the assistance of the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and soon, the First Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), setting out an extensive package of austerity measures and structural reforms that Greece would need to implement in return for a 110 billion euro 'bail-out' loan, was signed on 8 May 2010 between the Greek government led by Prime Minister (PM) George Papandreou and the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank, IMF).

Greece's two-party system featuring the centre-left PASOK and centre-right New Democracy that had dominated the country's politics for 40 years (Pappas 2013) was already in a process of transformation. At least since 2007 Greek bipartyism was in decline, in terms of the total share of the vote that the two main parties commanded, party identification and the levels of trust that citizens placed in the political system (Teperoglou & Tsatsanis 2014, pp. 224-228). However, it was only after the ratification of the May 2010 bail-out agreement by the Greek Parliament that a domino effect was triggered whose outcome would be the complete reshaping of the party system between 2010 and 2015.

**Graph 1** Greek National Election Results, 2004-2015 %



Source: Greek Ministry of the Interior, available at:

<http://www.ypes.gr/en/Elections/NationalElections/Results/>

As a result of MP defections, party splits and multiple electoral contests within this period, SYRIZA has been transformed from an established but minor party in the Greek party system that did not much exceed the three per cent threshold of parliamentary representation into a major party, commanding the largest share of the vote in Greece, while PASOK, the major party of the centre left between 1981 and 2012, has been relegated to minor party status. The centre-right New Democracy remains a major party but has been significantly downsized. In the meantime, the parties that acted as junior government partners to PASOK and New Democracy between 2010 and 2015 effectively disappeared from the political map (the far right LAOS [Λαϊκός Ορθόδοξος Συναγερμός – Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos] and the moderate left DIMAR [Δημοκρατική Αριστερά - Democratiki Aristera). New parties have emerged such as nationalist right Independent Greeks [Ανεξάρτητοι Έλληνες] and centrist The River [Το Ποτάμι] while minor parties that were unsuccessful before the crisis seem to have found their niche, such as far right Golden Dawn [Χρυσή Αυγή - Chrysi Avgi] and Centre Union [Ένωση Κέντρου - Enosi Kentrou]. Of the pre-2012 minor parties, only the KKE Κομμουνιστικό Κόμμα Ελλάδος - Communist Party of Greece) has remained largely stable in terms of its electoral appeal. A new bipartyism (Nicolacopoulos & Martín 2015) or ‘polarised pluralism’ (Tsirbas 2015) whose main protagonists are SYRIZA and New Democracy seems to have crystallised at the time of writing (Graph 1).

SYRIZA's electoral rise took place in two steps. The first was between the aforementioned signing of the first MoU in May 2010 and the twin 'earthquake' elections of May and June 2012 that saw SYRIZA become main party of opposition in Greece (Voulgaris & Nicolakopoulos 2014) and the second between 2012 and 2015 when SYRIZA won a European election (2014) and two national elections (January and September 2015) becoming main party of government (Eleftheriou 2015).

**Table 1** SYN and SYRIZA's Results in National Elections (1992-2015), % vote & seats/300

	1993	1996	2000	2004	2007	2009	2012a	2012b	2015a	2015b
Seats	-	10	6	6	14	13	52	71	149	145
%	2.9	5.12	3.20	3.26	5.04	4.60	16.8	27.8	36.3	35.5

Source: Greek Ministry of the Interior, available at:

<http://www.ypes.gr/en/Elections/NationalElections/Results/>

Note: Until 2000 the results refer to the party of Synaspismos. Between 2004 and 2012a the results refer to the SYRIZA coalition of which Synaspismos was a founding member and main component. From 2012b onwards SYRIZA competed in elections as a unified party.

Despite its robust parliamentary opposition and negative vote to the First MoU, SYRIZA did not improve its electoral performance in the 2010 local and regional elections. A year of harsh austerity measures associated with the First MoU was followed by the emergence of the movement of the squares (the Outraged) in the summer of 2011 that had SYRIZA's full support. As the public debt skyrocketed, the economy continued to contract and unemployment reached a record 17 per cent, the autumn of 2011 saw the government negotiate a second loan and MoU with the country's lenders. On the occasion of the national celebration of Greek refusal to submit to Italian rule on 28 October 1940 (which signaled Greece's entry in WW2) mass spontaneous anti-government demonstrations broke out across the country. Within two days, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October the PM announced a referendum whereby the people would have their say on the second MoU. SYRIZA was not in favour of the referendum, urging the government to abolish the Memorandum and associated measures via the parliamentary route instead. Under pressure from the EU PM Papandreou withdrew his decision to hold a referendum and despite narrowly winning a vote of confidence in Parliament resigned his office a few days later to give way to a transitional



government under former European Central Bank (ECB) Vice President Loukas Papademos. SYRIZA called this a ‘blatant distortion of popular sovereignty’ and called for elections (Tsipras 2011). SYRIZA exercised poignant opposition and did not support the new government in the Parliament.

As the Papademos government (supported by PASOK, ND and LAOS) ratified the 2<sup>nd</sup> MoU in February 2012 and several majority MPs defected, SYRIZA called for a ‘Government of the Left’. Elections were called for May 2012 in which SYRIZA came second, increasing its vote to 16.3 per cent, ahead of PASOK (13 per cent) and just behind New Democracy (19 per cent). SYRIZA rejected Samaras’ invitation to form a coalition government of national unity and the country was led to a new election in June 2012. Before the June election SYRIZA declared it would not co-operate with any of the parties that had agreed to the MoUs. In June SYRIZA increased its vote share to 26.6 per cent assuming the role of official opposition to the coalition government of PASOK, ND and DIMAR that resulted.

**Table 2** Timeline of Events

September 2009	National election – PASOK victory, SYRIZA at 4.6 per cent.
May 2010	1 <sup>st</sup> MoU approved in Parliament – SYRIZA votes against.
November 2010	Regional and local elections - SYRIZA supports Alexis Mitropoulos in the Attica Region with modest results.
May 2011	Emergence of the Outraged – SYRIZA supports the movement.
October 2011	The PM announces a referendum on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> MoU – SYRIZA is against.
November 2011	Collapse of the PASOK government, appointment of the Papademos government (supported by PASOK, New Democracy and LAOS) – SYRIZA does not offer vote of confidence, calls for elections.
February 2012	2 <sup>nd</sup> MoU approved in Parliament – SYRIZA votes against.
May 2012	National election – SYRIZA becomes second party with 16.8 per cent and refuses to participate in government of national unity with ND, PASOK and DIMAR.
June 2012	National election – SYRIZA gains 27.8 per cent and becomes the official opposition.
May 2014	European and regional/local elections – SYRIZA wins the European elections with 26.6 per cent, wins Attika Region and comes a close second in the Athens municipality.
December 2014	Election for the President of the Republic by the Greek Parliament – SYRIZA does not support the government’s candidate Dimas, the

	Parliament is dissolved.
January 2015	National election – SYRIZA wins with 36.3 per cent. The first SYRIZA-ANEL government under PM Alexis Tsipras is sworn in.
June 2015	Capital controls, failure to meet IMF payment, the government calls a referendum on the agreement proposed by the Troika – SYRIZA supports NO.
July 2015	NO wins by 61.31% - The first SYRIZA-ANEL government agrees to a Third MoU.
August 2015	3 <sup>rd</sup> MoU approved in Parliament – SYRIZA splits with 32 of its MPs voting against and 11 abstaining.
September 2015	National election – SYRIZA wins with 35.5 per cent. The second SYRIZA-ANEL government is sworn in.

Ahead of the 2014 European elections Alexis Tsipras stood as candidate for Commission President nominated by the Party of the European Left. SYRIZA ran the campaigns for the European elections and the local and regional elections of 2014 (which coincided) in tandem. The final election rallies were held under the same theme: 'Three ballot boxes, one option: victory!' with Tsipras as lead candidate for Commission President, Rena Dourou as candidate for the Attica region and Gabriel Sakellarides as candidate for the municipality of Athens appearing in the same podium. SYRIZA won the European election (its first nationwide victory) and the Attica region and came a very close second in Athens (Tsirbas 2015).

In November 2014 the term of the President of the Republic was up and the Parliament held an election for his replacement. SYRIZA refused to provide its support to the candidate proposed by New Democracy and PASOK, moderate centre right former Commissioner Stavros Dimas, and the required supermajority was not achieved. The Parliament was dissolved and the country was led to national elections in January 2015. SYRIZA won the elections gaining 35.3 per cent of the vote and was only two seats short of a parliamentary majority. After the Communist Party of Greece refused to back a 'Government of the Left', SYRIZA formed a coalition government with nationalist right, but strongly anti-MoU Independent Greeks. A team of key government ministers under Tsipras himself including the Deputy PM Giannis Dragasakis, Finance Minister Yiannis Varoufakis and the deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Euclid Tsakalotos proceeded to renegotiate the bail-out settlement. The government's aims were a major write-off of the Greek debt, a loosening of

fiscal policy and a push back of a number of unsavory labour market and social security reforms and privatisations.

After seven months of inconclusive negotiations and a halt to bailout tranches being disbursed, Greek public coffers were empty and the government under immense pressure from the country's creditors. Being handed what he called an ultimatum by the Eurogroup Alexis Tsipras and his team of negotiators left Brussels on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June and called a referendum for the 6<sup>th</sup> of July on the new bail-out package that the Troika had put on the table which included a Third MoU. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June the government introduced capital controls and on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June the country failed to meet its debt repayment to the IMF. Before the referendum SYRIZA called for an anti-austerity and pro-democracy No vote, while the opposition (PASOK, ND and The River) along with the grassroots 'Remain in Europe' campaign rallied for a Yes vote on the grounds that failing to comply with the creditors' proposals Greece was risking a rough exit from the Eurozone and ultimately its place in the European Union. Tsipras won the referendum with an unexpected 61 per cent of the vote only to capitulate to European Council proposals under the threat of Greece being forced out of the Eurozone two days later.

Conceding defeat, in August 2015 SYRIZA took the Third MoU through Parliament with numerous defections from amongst its own ranks. A party split followed with SYRIZA's hard Eurosceptic wing exiting to form a new party, Popular Unity. Appealing to the loss of support from his MPS in Parliament and the need for the government to renew its mandate after its defeat in the negotiations Tsipras called a new election in September 2015. SYRIZA contested the September elections claiming it would turn its focus to the domestic 'front', implement a 'parallel programme' to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, introduce measures to deepen democracy and 'clean up' Greece's corrupt clientelist system. Despite the U-turn that SYRIZA performed it won the elections by 35.5 per cent of the vote consolidating major party status. A second SYRIZA-ANEL government was formed to take the helm of the country and implement the Third MoU. The following sections attempt to explain SYRIZA's electoral trajectory by analysing the evolution of its political strategy throughout the 2010-2015 period and the factors that rendered it successful.

### **Crafting the strategy: 'protest' and 'competence'**

#### *Issue Ownership*

SYRIZA (Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς - Coalition of the Radical Left) was an electoral and political alliance between the democratic socialist, former Eurocommunist party of Synaspismos (Συνασπισμός της Αριστεράς, της Οικολογίας και των Κινήσεων- Coalition of the Left, Ecology and Movements) and a host of other minor parties, groups and personalities of the extra parliamentary left, that contested elections in Greece between March 2004 and May 2012. After the May 2012 national elections SYRIZA was transformed into a unified political party. Throughout the lifespan of the SYRIZA coalition Synaspismos remained its largest and most influential component (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou 2013). SYRIZA's origins are to be found in 2001 when the leaders of the coalition's original components announced the formation of a 'Space for Dialogue and Common Action of the Left' (SDCAL) aimed at providing the political groundwork for the unification of the Greek left and an organizational platform for its participation in the Global Justice Movement (GJM) of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (SYN 2001).

Inspired by the onset of the Global Justice Movement, in the context of the drive to reunify the Left that the SYRIZA coalition represented and mindful especially of the experience of the French Communist Party's participation in both the Mitterand (1981-1984) and Jospin (1997-2002) centre-left coalition governments that was assessed to be instrumental for the PCF's electoral decline (Interview 4), the leadership of Synaspismos had become convinced that for the Greek radical left:

'electoral survival or improvement would go through developing links with the social movements and the younger generation and not through participation in government' (Interview 1).

Joining and remaining engaged in the SDCAL was itself an attempt to develop and express those links at the political level for Synaspismos. Hence, from 2004 when SYRIZA replaced the SDCAL it adopted an 'issue ownership' strategy addressed to the youth alongside a protest strategy. SYRIZA appealed to a section of young urban voters strategically (Balafas 2012, p. 268) through their engagement with the GJM (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou 2013) but also by selecting Alexis Tsipras, a 34 year old former leader of the Synaspismos Youth Wing to be its President in 2009.

SYRIZA's protest strategy was evident in its chosen approach towards social mobilisations, which involved the:

'core choice to be present in all social movement activity...it is a movement-party that always participates in what happens on the ground and tries to bring that to the political level without taking over the social movements' (Interview 4).

At the level of public discourse SYRIZA's protest strategy was articulated via a scathing critique of international capitalism, by adopting a version of soft Euroscepticism and by vehemently rejecting any future government coalition with PASOK as a junior partner (Tsakatika 2009). While both 'issue ownership' and 'protest' strategies helped SYRIZA consolidate its electoral share and modest but stable parliamentary representation and renew its cadre pool, none of the two had paid additional electoral dividends. The party's performance in the national elections of 2009, which PASOK won by a landslide, was slightly lower in comparison with the previous 2007 election (Table 1).

### *Protest*

The period between June 2011 and June 2012, was characterised by very high levels of social mobilisation and electoral volatility (Rudig & Karyotis 2014). Over the course of that period SYRIZA abandoned its 'issue ownership' strategy that had targeted a niche youth constituency and refocused its protest strategy, aiming to mobilise the discontent of the extensive social strata that were being adversely affected by the austerity measures associated with the MoU (Katsambekis 2015).

Continuity with SYRIZA's pre-2010 protest strategy was obvious in its refusal to act as a government partner to the parties that had ruled the country before the crisis, its 'soft' Eurosceptic position and most importantly, the types of mobilisation it continued to privilege, i.e. its support of strikes, street demonstrations and extra parliamentary co-operation with protest movements (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou 2013). SYRIZA members took part wholeheartedly in the strikes, anti-austerity protests and social movements that emerged from the crisis, particularly the mass movement of 'the squares' or the Outraged [Αγανακτισμένοι] of Syntagma Square in June 2011, which involved daily anti-government protests against austerity and in advocacy of direct democratic practices (Sotirakopoulos & Sotiropoulos 2013). The SYRIZA party itself acted as the Outraged movement's political representative and advocate in the Parliament and the mass media (Tsakatika & Eleftheriou 2013). Through the participation of its activists in the Outraged movement SYRIZA also expanded its social reach. In the words of a SYRIZA strategist:

'In the squares it was easy for a political milieu that was already constituted (SYRIZA) to become hegemonic. In something that is so fluid and spontaneous and a first for a vast part of the people, in all this aura of direct democracy and Assemblies...our people were there anyway...there was no (formal party) decision to be there, we were just there' (Interview 2).

Furthermore, SYRIZA's support for the solidarity networks and initiatives that developed at the local level and involved many SYRIZA members, particularly between 2010 and 2012 through its MP-funded NGO 'Solidarity 4 All' was another aspect of the party's support for extra parliamentary mobilisation. Solidarity for All acts as a hub for the mapping, networking and support of solidarity initiatives across the country involved in the distribution of food, provision of health and public education services, or management of employment collectives, occupied parks and other public spaces (Vaious & Kalandides 2016, pp. 463-464).

According to a key SYRIZA strategist, after the 2012 elections the levels of spontaneous social mobilisation diminished. This can be attributed to 'a logic of delegation on behalf of SYRIZA supporters' (Interview 4) who could now see the probability of SYRIZA being the next government and addressing the claims of the social movements from a position of power. Nonetheless, to the extent that popular protest did take place, up until the eve of the national elections of September 2015 SYRIZA continued to support and voice the claims of social movements in political debate. For instance, the demonstrations outside the national broadcaster (ERT) that was shut down virtually overnight by order of the PM Antonis Samaras in June 2013, was a key instance of protest against the authoritarian bent that the governing 'elites' had taken according to SYRIZA. Alexis Tsipras as leader of the opposition attended them himself. Likewise in 2014 SYRIZA supported local environmental protests in the Chalkidiki region of Northern Greece against the government decision to allow mining by Canadian gold-mining company Eldorado Gold (Panayiotakis 2015).

However, August 2015 marked a turning point in SYRIZA's protest strategy from the point of view of its approach to social mobilisation. It became much more difficult for the party to retain its profile as the privileged interlocutor and vocaliser of the claims of anti-austerity social movements once its leadership is in government implementing unpopular austerity measures linked to the Third MoU.

Alongside continuity, SYRIZA's protest strategy also underwent change. The novelty was its discursive shift towards left populism (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014). SYRIZA attempted to dichotomise political space by introducing a Manichean distinction between the 'pure' people and the 'corrupt' elites (Mudde 2004), with SYRIZA understood as part of the people. A prominent example came in the electoral campaign for the May 2012 elections where one of the core slogans on a very popular series of posters was 'Us or them', which deliberately aimed to:

'lay down the dividing line and locate SYRIZA not in terms of the political personnel, i.e. 'SYRIZA or New Democracy', but in terms of the social division 'us' (the many) or them (those who have brought us to this point)' (Interview 4).

This was accompanied by constant references to the need to address the 'humanitarian crisis' that affected a third of the population by extending welfare rights, support for direct democratic engagement through the 'movement' and frequent mention of the 'dignity' of the Greek people and their struggles which must be defended against a corrupt domestic elite that colludes with the foreign elites of Northern Europe (in particular Germany/Merkel). An analysis of SYRIZA's 2014 European election manifesto points out that the discourse employed to describe 'us' made as much reference to popular sovereignty (the people) and the left (movement, SYRIZA, the left) as to *national* sovereignty (Greeks, the nation) (Tsakatika, Graziano & Font 2015).

SYRIZA's appeal to 'our people' was an appeal to:

'The 99 per cent... all those who are affected by the economic crisis. The lower middle class is also hit by the crisis. Even industrialists are hit by the crisis... Everyone is hit by the crisis and hence 'the people' takes a very broad meaning. It goes much beyond the people of the left' (Interview 1).

Nonetheless, SYRIZA's populist discourse did draw its inspiration from past successful experiences of broad left unity particularly focusing its discourse and symbols on presenting SYRIZA as the historical successor to the National Liberation Front (EAM) (1941-1944) (Panagiotopoulos 2012). EAM was the political wing of the broad, egalitarian mass movement of youth, women and men that organised the civilian and armed resistance against German occupation, effectively led by the Communist Party of Greece (Mazower 2001). The frontline presence of Manolis Glezos, octogenarian hero of the resistance against German Occupation in the ranks of SYRIZA, the multiple symbolic references to EAM and particular events that occurred during the resistance period (the execution of 200 Greeks by the Nazis in Kaisariani, a neighbourhood still considered one of Athens' 'red' strongholds), the constant reminders of the unresolved (according to SYRIZA) question of German war reparations, the linkage between Solidarity4All and the legacy of EAM, whose strong priority, particularly during the first years, was the distribution of food and medical supplies to the destitute population of Athens and the countryside (Mazower 2001) were central to the symbolic construction of SYRIZA's discursive offensive. They were core elements of a narrative that presented SYRIZA as EAM's heroic, patriotic and unitary successor, the 'people' as the broadest possible constituency of the left and the 'other' (domestic and European) against which protest was directed as German.

## *Competence*

In July 2011, four months before the collapse of the Papandreou government but already in the turbulent context of its decline, SYRIZA held a crucial meeting of its Central Committee where the notion of a 'coalition of political and social forces' that would claim government responsibility was first put forward. At its core the 'coalition of social and political forces' involved the mobilisation of a social constituency comprising:

'the forces of labour, knowledge and culture' and 'a coalition of left political forces, such as SYRIZA' (Interview 3).

In that meeting all party factions converged on the need to change the party's electoral strategy from a primarily protest strategy to a strategy that also involved claiming government responsibility:

'...the destruction is too overwhelming, we cannot proceed only with the movement, the movement cannot win and we must proceed to the next stage... everyone agreed. All of SYRIZA's components. It was an escape forward in a phase where the movement practices we were familiar with did not seem to work... because society achieved the greatest possible movement twice in 2011. In every town, in every village the people were on the streets. It hit the roof. Municipal bands were playing EAM songs, there was the big demonstration of Patras... the whole country was in a state of madness. There was nothing more that could be done (in terms of protest). And the Memorandum was approved. And so we said that this cannot be stopped only with the movement. We must move on to the second phase (Interview 1).'

This was the background to the concept of a 'Government of the Left' which SYRIZA proposed when it stepped forward and claimed government responsibility for itself on the run up to the May 2012 national elections (Eleftheriou 2015, p. 65). It is very difficult to understand SYRIZA's electoral success without the claim for government responsibility articulated in terms of the 'Government of the Left':

'In the (first) 2012 (elections) we were aiming for a two digit result, ten, eleven, thirteen per cent... but we came across a phenomenon that took the form of a wave... This must be associated with what was going on in society in the meantime, our relationship with the social movements, the squares, all of that... but if I must isolate one factor (that explains electoral success) I believe that the Left appears as a force that says: good morning to you, we are here and we can take over the government of the country. Without this, in my view,



we may have had an increase in our percentage around ten per cent, but I do not think that we would have this leap, this take-off' (Interview 3).

SYRIZA's claim for government responsibility was coupled with the introduction of a *competence* strategy alongside its protest strategy. The main aim of this strategy was to strengthen the credibility of SYRIZA as a potential party of government given that it had had no substantial experience of government up to that point. SYRIZA tried to show that it had the best plan to lead the country out of the crisis and the best people to take that plan forward, facing an uphill struggle on both counts.

SYRIZA was a party of the radical left that was forced to come up with a plan for government having had 'no international point of reference or paradigm to point to' (Interview 2). SYRIZA's 500 page long programme, 'For the Left of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' that had been approved by extraordinary Conference in 2009 made references to an 'economy of needs' and declared nationalising strategic economic sectors, developing the social economy and relocating resources to productive sectors such as agriculture, education, research and the environment as key objectives (SYN 2009). SYRIZA was a party that had neither been nor had expected to be in government until very recently and this was reflected in the general, declaratory and idealistic language of its 2009 programme.

After the May 2012 elections, as it was becoming clear that SYRIZA's plan would be under close scrutiny due to its electoral success, SYRIZA shifted the emphasis from declaring their intention to 'scrap' the MoUs, or as Alexis Tsipras put it in a well-known turn of phrase in Parliament in November 2012 'abolish (it) with one law and in one article' (Tsipras 2012a, p. 4541) to 'renegotiating the Memorandum' and 'replacing' it with a 'national plan of economic reconstruction' (Dragasakis 2012), based on the 2009 programme (Tsipras 2012b).

A standing Programme Committee was set up in 2013, after it became clear in the June 2012 elections that there was a real possibility for SYRIZA to be entrusted with Greece's government, consisting of party cadres, parliamentarians and associated experts to refine the party's programme and render it fit for purpose (Dragasakis 2014). In the context of the September 2014 Thessaloniki international fair, Tsipras put forward what became known as the *Thessaloniki Programme* meant to further specify what SYRIZA would do immediately upon winning national government. In the 'internal' front it would introduce emergency measures to address the humanitarian crisis, promote tax justice, create jobs and introduce measures to deepen democracy. In the 'external' front it would demand a policy of 'quantitative easing' by the ECB, a public investment plan financed by the EIB, a European conference on South European debt and to be allowed to run a balanced budget rather than a budget in primary surplus (SYRIZA 2014). In brief, SYRIZA's plan was to renegotiate the

terms of the bail out agreements with the creditors while remaining in a reformed Eurozone. This was a palatable idea ridden with contradictions (Dinas & Rori 2012). It assumed a positive response of the creditors to SYRIZA's demands while proclaiming the intention to remain in the Eurozone independently of the creditors' response. It also assumed that SYRIZA's victory would inspire a pan-European progressive alliance that would rally behind reform in the direction of a more social and democratic European Union while heavily criticising European social democracy for its rightward drift.

Alongside the effort to project SYRIZA as having a plan to rescue the country, the party emphasised the technical ability and the honesty of its cadres. Before and during the 2012 electoral campaigns a number of prominent economists that held important positions in the party's leadership (Tsakalotos, Dragasakis, Milios, Stathakis, Sakellarides) took the heavy onus of presenting, explaining and debating the party's economic strategy in the mass media while attacking the mainstream parties' economic strategies with knowledgeable, technically sound and politically sophisticated arguments. The economists that mounted SYRIZA's front line of attack were not just 'technocrats'; most were seasoned politicians and/or political activists with a long presence in Greek public life. However their technical knowledge was meant to inspire confidence among the voters of the left as well as among the citizens that switched their vote to SYRIZA and lent credence to the idea of a 'government of the left':

'There was a need for whoever went (to the media) to know what they are talking about...to be well prepared...to show that there is something more solid than what all the others were proposing...and for what we proposed to appear as reasonable...that what SYRIZA says is the sober and reasonable claim of a society that cannot continue with the failed programme that is destroying it after five years...and they (the economists) emanated this message and a knowledge of what was going on from the economic side...were another cadre to go they would find that difficult...that was it...there was the need at the time to appear to know what you were talking about. Not that the party could fully control (who appeared in the media), only to a certain extent...but yes, insofar as we could implement it, yes there was that line' (Interview 1).

Despite these prominent economists' presence in the 2012 electoral campaigns, the pool of experienced SYRIZA cadres that could staff the parliamentary group, the political aides and advisors' positions and – after January 2015 – the Greek government was extremely limited given that SYRIZA had been a minor party whose vote share barely reached five per cent until the eve of the 2012 elections. Indicatively, between the 2009 and June 2012 elections the number of SYRIZA MPs increased from 13 to 71. Despite the fact that most MPs had previously held elected positions in local government, trade unions or other collective bodies

(Koltsida 2013, p. 45-56) and could hence be argued to have had some degree of management experience, only 20 per cent had previous parliamentary experience. The composition of both SYRIZA led governments in 2015 involved a significant number of prominent technocrats or professionals external to the party broadly supportive of the left who were called upon to lend their credentials to the government, not least Yiannis Varoufakis, Finance Minister until July 2015.

The lack of experience of most SYRIZA cadres in posts of responsibility was a double edged sword when it came to credibility. On the one hand SYRIZA could claim that having had no government experience meant its cadres were not corrupt and hence could be trusted to run the country; They were inexperienced but they were 'new faces' that had not been involved in the clientelist spoils system that PASOK and New Democracy had built over the democratic period (Pappas 2013). On the other hand being new to professional politics its cadres were not recognised by voters, therefore SYRIZA's opponents could claim that they had no experience to run the country.

Within the SYRIZA leadership a difference of opinion (cutting across party factions) had been at work since the regional elections of 2010 on how to deal with this conundrum. At the time, the party decided to support the candidacy of Alexis Mitropoulos, a former PASOK member and prominent labour lawyer, for the leadership of the Attica region, the most populated and most politically significant in the country. Part of the leadership believed that:

'the (Radical) Left cannot become the majority, ergo it needs to break off a part of social democracy which it must reposition on the Left and working together with them will take us to the government' (Interview 1).

This did not entail a formal coalition strategy with the crumbling PASOK but rather it meant that recognisable cadres that leave PASOK would be welcome to collaborate with SYRIZA, 'independently of what image they had in society' (Interview 1). Collaboration with these cadres would take place both in the parliament, i.e. with defecting MPs such as Louka Katseli and Panayiotis Kouroubilis both former PASOK ministers, and by supporting the candidacies of well-known former PASOK members such as Olympic champion Sofia Sakorafa or indeed Alexis Mitropoulos.

Another part of the leadership though held the view that:

'...relationships of political representation have been broken, political identities have been liquidated, what was valid in the '80s and '90s i.e. rigidity in what people voted, what they were...is no longer there in Greek society and therefore we should not do that (collaborate

with or put forward former PASOK cadres as candidates) because it is frowned upon. We must instead rely on a profile of new, not necessarily young, but of 'new' characteristics... more citizen, normal person, politically active in society, a participant in social movements, etc.' (Interview 1).

The leader of the party himself, Alexis Tsipras, was a representative of these 'new' characteristics:

'We had a charismatic leader who is... young, no one can attribute anything to him from the past, he has a strong critique against corruption...he comes from a process that is totally 'clean' (Interview 4).

Tsipras was considered an asset to the party's electoral appeal from this point of view and hence electoral campaigns, increasingly after 2012, were focused to a considerable extent on his person, particularly the campaign for the 2014 European elections where Tsipras was also the lead candidate for European Commission President put forward by the Party of the European Left. For instance, one of the key elements of the campaign for the January 2015 national elections was the brochure that set out the key features of the Thessaloniki Programme which:

'was focused on Alexis – the programme is identified with the Prime Minister candidate' (Interview 4)

This difference of opinion amongst the leadership manifested itself in SYRIZA's candidate selection from 2010 onwards which was characterised by the inclusion of *both* 'new faces' active in the radical left *and* recognisable former PASOK cadres in party lists. This approach reflected a compromise amongst the ranks of the leadership but at the same time it diluted the message that SYRIZA cadres were 'new' to professional politics and hence could be trusted to run the country with honesty.

The credibility that SYRIZA had tried to establish before winning the January 2015 elections was tarnished by the failure of its plan (Moschonas 2015). The way the seven month long negotiation process with the creditors (February-July 2015) unfolded, the imposition of capital controls in July 2015 and the U-turn that SYRIZA was forced to perform by signing the Third MoU in August 2015 put a major strain on the government's ability to lead the country out of its financial troubles. The argument that it had the most honest people to take responsibility for government was nonetheless still by and large available to the party. In the electoral campaign for the September 2015 elections SYRIZA thus attempted to compensate for the credibility loss it had suffered by projecting the left's 'moral advantage'.

In summary, between June 2011 and June 2012, SYRIZA's strategy underwent a major transformation. It moved away from a niche 'issue ownership' strategy directed towards young voters in two new directions: a 'protest' strategy that involved both support for protest movements and a new populist discourse aimed at mobilising a broad constituency of disaffected voters; and a 'competence' strategy that saw the party claim government responsibility on the grounds that it was more capable to rescue the country and its cadres more honest compared to those of the 'old' parties that had ruled the country over the democratic period.

### **Explaining success: why SYRIZA won**

Radical left party success often depends on the absence of a strong social democratic competitor (Olsen et al 2010). Indeed over the period under examination SYRIZA primarily aimed to win over former PASOK voters that distanced themselves from the party *en masse*. In so doing the party faced electoral competition from a significant number of contender minor parties on the left, particularly the KKE and DIMAR between 2010 and 2012, to which was added The River, a party of the 'radical centre', after 2014. Over the 2010-2015 period all minor Greek parties faced the same institutional constraints posed by the Greek electoral system.

'Enhanced proportionality' reflects an electoral system that couples proportionality with a 50 (out of a total of 300) seat bonus for the party that receives the largest nationwide share of the vote and a three per cent entry threshold to Parliament. This is a system that offers a relatively low bar for representation thereby not excluding minor parties with a modest nationwide appeal. At the same time by rewarding the first party generously and penalising the second party, thus incentivising the polarisation of voters around two potential governing alternatives, the system has majoritarian effects. In other words, bar exceptional circumstances that would see voters distance themselves from the two major parties to a significant extent, such as the ones experienced over the 2010-2015 period, all minor parties would be expected to encounter relatively favourable conditions for entry to parliament but very serious institutional constraints in achieving major party status.

Why was SYRIZA's new strategy more successful in winning votes than the strategies of its competitors under similar institutional constraints? It will be argued in this section that SYRIZA's choice of strategy provided a better response to electoral demand compared to the choices made by its minor competitors. Furthermore, despite being a minor party SYRIZA succeeded in playing a part in shaping the context within which its major

competitors' strategies unfolded. It did so in a way that favoured the success of its own strategy.

### *Meeting Demand*

Four factors on the demand side could have been expected to favour not only SYRIZA but also other minor parties that were in competition with SYRIZA, mainly the KKE, DIMAR and The River. First, there was a legacy of mass broad political identification with the left in Greece going back to the 1940s (EAM) that left and centre-left parties could appeal to and have appealed to in the past (Tsakatika 2014). The KKE and DIMAR could lay claim to this legacy to the same extent as SYRIZA. Yet SYRIZA came across as the most consistent representative of left unity. Not only was it itself a coalition of left wing groups and independents (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013), but also called for unity of all left parties against the austerity measures and the Memorandum of Understanding. On the other hand DIMAR was a split from SYRIZA itself and the KKE turned down all of SYRIZA's calls for a united front proclaiming its own strategy to be superior (Tsakatika 2014). The way in which SYRIZA's protest strategy was crafted seems to have been more convincing to the electorate of the left, broadly conceived, because in contrast to its competitors SYRIZA could present itself as a unifying, rather than sectarian, political project.

Second, Eurosceptic attitudes that can be expected to provide fertile ground for minor protest parties (Taggart 1998) were on the rise in Greece over the crisis period (Serricchio, Tsakatika & Quaglia 2013). Since it was 'soft' rather than 'hard' Euroscepticism that was on the rise (Clements, Nanou & Verney 2014, p. 263) SYRIZA could be argued to have been in a better position than both the 'hard' Eurosceptic Communist party and the 'uncritically' pro-European DIMAR and The River to benefit from this upsurge. Indeed, SYRIZA held firm to its 'soft' Eurosceptic stance throughout the period in question. SYRIZA criticised the architecture of EMU and the Eurozone, democracy in European Union and the politics of austerity that the Union had 'constitutionalised' while making proposals for reform. At the same time, despite containing a vocal 'hard' Eurosceptic minority, the leadership and the majority of the party were consistent in their unquestioning support for Greece's continuing membership of both the European Union and the Eurozone.

Third, the sharp economic downturn that followed the adoption of the Memorandum, including the rise of unemployment and poverty, could have been expected to favour any of the minor protest parties, particularly on the left (Kriesi 2014). A new constituency (Spourdalakis 2013, p. 106) was argued to have come into play bringing together the

disaffected social categories most adversely impacted upon by the economic crisis, that is, inhabitants of large urban centres, salaried employees, the economically active population and younger age groups (Mavris 2012). The KKE and DIMAR could have appealed to the economically disaffected to the same extent that SYRIZA did. DIMAR presented itself as a competent and reliable force on the moderate left that could set the country on course to economic recovery to the benefit of all. At the same time while being critical of the Memoranda of Understanding, DIMAR supported some of their modernising aspects and did not decline the invitation to join the Samaras government between 2012-2013 thus being more nuanced in its message and less inclined to act as the voice of popular discontent. The KKE held steadfast to a protest strategy that appealed to sectors of the working class and small business owners whose jobs and incomes had been affected by the crisis but refused to provide a medium-term plan in response to the crisis while resisting all invitations to take part in government. SYRIZA's protest *and* competence strategy seems to have been more attractive to the strata that were economically affected by the crisis since it offered both a way to express indignation and an immediate plan of action.

Finally, anti-party sentiments directed against the two major parties primarily on grounds of their lack of competence and perceived high levels of corruption had been running high even before the crisis (Constandinidis & Tsakatika 2011). These factors could have benefited all three of the minor parties mentioned above in electoral terms. DIMAR's participation in the Samaras government between 2012 and 2013 (Interview 2) and the KKE's refusal to distinguish between the old bipartyism and all other parties that had not taken part in government, meant that there was only one competitor for SYRIZA on this front. The River, a pro-EU party of the 'progressive radical centre' (Theodorakis 2016) that appeared two months before the 2014 European and regional/local elections emerged with an anti-establishment agenda directed against the old bipartyism; at the same time it claimed to be the vehicle that would bring 'the worthy' into politics, citizens who were prominent in their professional fields but who had not been involved in politics before. However, unlike the bulk of SYRIZA's elected politicians, many of the candidates that The River put forward in the 2014 and 2015 elections were not first timers in Greek politics but had been involved in the PASOK governments of Kostas Simitis, small groups and parties of the liberal centre that had invariably failed to gain parliamentary representation in past decades, or came to The River from DIMAR. SYRIZA's competence strategy which ultimately relied more on honesty rather than experience seems to have been more in tune with demand, at least over the period in question.

In summary, SYRIZA's choice of strategy seems to have met electoral demand factors more successfully than the strategies adopted by other minor parties that the party was competing

against for votes. It was more convincing in the answers it provided for voters' growing disaffection with PASOK and more broad negative orientations towards the two major parties. It was more in tune with Greek citizens' changing attitudes towards Europe. Finally, it offered voters a vehicle to express both their anger against the major parties and the hope that there is an alternative to austerity (Karyotis, Pamphilis & Rüdiger 2016) that does not entail leaving the EU or the Eurozone.

### *Shaping the Strategic Context*

After the ratification of the first MoU by the Greek Parliament in May 2010 Greek political parties divided along two new issue dimensions. These can be identified as the Memorandum - anti-Memorandum issue dimension (Dinas and Rori 2012) which combined party positions on the economic dimension with party positions on Europe (Katsanidou and Otjis 2016) and the 'old' versus 'new' politics issue dimension which marked out the parties that had not been part of governing the country before the economic crisis from those that had. Party positions along both issue dimensions cut across the left - right cleavage.

After the ratification of the first MoU in May 2010 parties divided between those that supported the agreement as an opportunity for Greece to reform and remain in Europe (PASOK, LAOS) and those that opposed the agreement as detrimental to the Greek economy claiming that a renegotiation of the terms associated with the bail-out loan (the 'Memorandum') within Europe was possible (New Democracy, SYRIZA) and a party that opposed the agreement calling for eventual voluntary Grexit (KKE). New Democracy under PM Samaras had chosen to oppose the First MoU when the later was being ratified in Parliament and turn the issue into a main theme of opposition to PASOK (Samaras 2010, pp 6762-6765). It was in fact not SYRIZA, but New Democracy, a major and influential party that engaged in heresthetic manipulation by emphasising and legitimising the Memorandum-anti-Memorandum issue dimension in Greek politics (Loulis 2012) on the run up to the 2010 local and regional elections. SYRIZA had also run these elections on an anti-Memorandum platform but had been unsuccessful (Verney 2012). New Democracy had effectively appropriated the issue (Meguid 2005) leaving little space for the minor party of the left to benefit electorally by following a protest strategy directed against government agreement to the Memorandum.

Following the formation of the Papademos government in November 2011, a significant realignment along the Memorandum-anti-Memorandum divide took place when New Democracy joined the pro-Memorandum camp. The realignment represented a key



opportunity for SYRIZA, which saw its chance to take advantage of New Democracy's U-turn in order to dominate the anti-Memorandum camp. According to Riker's theory we would expect a party that expects to lose its majority to pursue a change in the number of issue dimensions. On the one hand, New Democracy, along with PASOK, now the two main government partners in a pro-Memorandum government would try to downplay the significance of the Memorandum-anti-Memorandum issue dimension. SYRIZA on the other hand, drew on the privileged relationship with the social movements it had developed as part of its protest strategy (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013) to maintain the Memorandum-anti-Memorandum issue dimension as politically salient. In brief, SYRIZA used the social mobilisation aspect of its protest strategy in order to keep the Memorandum-anti-Memorandum issue dimension central in the political debate. This in turn rendered the parameters of the political debate more amenable to the discursive side of its protest strategy.

A second issue dimension that SYRIZA increasingly appealed to more frequently after New Democracy joined the pro-Memorandum 'camp' in November 2011, was that between the 'old' and the 'new' politics (Tsipras 2014). The 'old' bipartyism (ND and PASOK) whose corrupt clientelist practices were to blame for the state of the country and its government 'allies' (LAOS and DIMAR) on the one hand and the 'new' parties that would clean up the old regime, unite the people and rescue the country from economic decline, 'humanitarian crisis' or 'humiliation' on the other, were represented by SYRIZA on the left, after 2012 Independent Greeks and Golden Dawn on the right and after 2014 by The River in the centre. SYRIZA's appeal to the 'moral advantage' of the left aimed for it to become the main representative and beneficiary of the 'old'-new politics issue dimension on the left.

In the electoral campaign that preceded the September 2015 elections SYRIZA found itself in the awkward position of major party of government that had just agreed to a Third MoU while having spent the last few years and built its electoral success by criticising the Memorandum and the parties that had agreed to it. In order to avoid defeat, in line with Riker's theory it would need to drop the Memorandum-anti-Memorandum issue dimension. Since no other party among the main opposition parties had an interest in continuing to retain the Memorandum-anti-Memorandum as a salient issue dimension SYRIZA was able to drop it. It was the 'old'-new dimension that SYRIZA would now prop up as the main issue dimension along which party competition would take place. SYRIZA emerged as the main 'new' party along the 'old'-new issue dimension and having thus fixed the parameters for the strategic context in such a way that it was amenable to its competence strategy, it won the September 2015 elections by appealing to the left's 'moral advantage'.

In summary, the success of SYRIZA's heresthetics can be attributed to its actions in two key moments, November 2011 and the summer of 2015. In the first instance, SYRIZA took advantage of New Democracy's shift from an anti- to a pro-Memorandum position to maintain the Memorandum-anti-Memorandum issue dimension at the centre of public debate and dominate the anti-Memorandum camp. In the second instance, SYRIZA succeeded in imposing the 'new'-old politics issue dimension as central, while eliminating the Memorandum-anti-Memorandum issue dimension. In the first case SYRIZA influenced the parameters of public debate in a way that they became more amenable to the success of its protest strategy. In the second case it influenced the setup of issue dimensions in such a way that the ground was fertile for its competence strategy.

## **Conclusions**

The present study of SYRIZA's political strategy makes a contribution to the broader literature on the electoral success of minor parties. It highlights the importance of the supply side and in particular the strategic choices confronting minor parties. It demonstrates that an 'issue ownership' strategy may well be safe if a minor party aims to consolidate a 'niche' in the party system, but it has a 'ceiling': a minor party needs to claim the big prize in the first place if it is to win it. Equally, a protest strategy on its own may help a minor party to mobilise a constituency of disaffected voters but it will not suffice for it to become a major party unless it claims that it is more competent to govern than its competitors. From a minor party's point of view a competence strategy need not be set out in terms of government experience as a junior coalition partner; it may be equally or even more effective when it is set out from the opposition on grounds of being a novice who can convince they would do a better job than the established major parties and is willing to assume government responsibility.

SYRIZA's victory took place against the background of truly exceptional events which radically changed the contours of electoral demand in Greece, leading to the total collapse of the PASOK vote after 2011. While the singularity of the Greek case is beyond doubt, European social democracy is under increasingly harsh electoral competition from a number of minor party contenders from across the political spectrum, while its 'crisis' has been extensively documented in the relevant literature (Keating and McCrone 2013). Therefore, the study of SYRIZA's electoral strategy may well be relevant to understanding the electoral threat that radical left challenger parties present for social democratic parties.

Finally, the analysis of the SYRIZA case also makes a contribution to the study of heresthetics by exposing the need to rethink Riker's art of political manipulation from the

perspective of minor parties. It demonstrates that being 'mere makeweights', that is, much more limited in the extent to which they can influence their strategic environment compared to major parties, minor parties' success can be expected to depend on the skill of their leaderships to take advantage of the heresthetic errors made by the major parties. This finding complements the current understanding of the 'manipulation of issue dimensions' as simply involving the introduction of a new salient issue dimension, the elimination of an existing issue dimension or the avoidance of the emergence of a new issue dimension. These heresthetic manoeuvres are relevant primarily to major parties. When SYRIZA was still a minor party in 2011 its main victory lay in leveraging its association with the (anti-austerity and anti-establishment) *Outraged* movement in order to maintain the saliency of the Memorandum-anti-Memorandum issue dimension and to 'hijack' the gap left by the shift of New Democracy to the pro-Memorandum camp. SYRIZA's success was very much New Democracy's failure.

### Biographical Note

Myrto Tsakatika is Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Glasgow. Her research interests lie in European Union governance, radical left parties and the comparative politics of Southern Europe. Her recent publications appear in the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, the *Journal of European Public Policy* and *South European Society and Politics*.

### References

- Balafas, G. (2012) *20 Χρόνια Χρειάστηκαν* [It Took 20 Years], Nisos, Athens.
- Bale, T. (2003) 'Cinderella and her ugly sisters: the mainstream and extreme right in Europe's bipolarising party systems', *West European Politics*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 67-90.
- Bélanger, E. (2004) 'Antipartyism and third-party vote choice. A comparison of Canada, Britain, and Australia', *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 37, no. 9, pp. 1054-1078.
- Bolleyer, N. (2013) *New Parties in Old Party Systems. Persistence and Decline in Seventeen Democracies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Clements, B., Nanou, K. & Verney, S. (2014) 'We no longer love you, but we don't want to leave you': The Eurozone crisis and popular Euroscepticism in Greece', *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 247-265.
- Constantinidis, G. and Tsakatika, M. (2011) "Αντιδικομματισμός" και αντικομματικά συναισθήματα στην Ελλάδα". ['Anti-bipartyism' and anti-party sentiments in Greece], In *Η κοινή γνώμη στην Ελλάδα (2008–2010)* [Public Opinion in Greece (2008–2010)], ed. Vernardakis, C., Savalas, Athens, pp. 65–100.

- Copus, C., Clark, A., Raynert, H. and Steyvers, K. (2009) 'Minor party and independent politics beyond the mainstream: Fluctuating fortunes but a permanent presence', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 62, no. 1, pp. 4-18.
- Dinas, E. & Rori, L. (2013) 'The 2012 Greek parliamentary elections: Fear and loathing in the polls', *West European Politics*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 270-282.
- Dragasakis, G. (2012) 'Ανοίγουμε νέους δρόμους' [We are opening new paths], Interview, *Real News*, 20 May 2012.
- Dragasakis, G. (2014) 'Απολογισμός της Επιτροπής Προγράμματος', [Report from the Programme Committee], *Avgi*, 23 June.
- Duverger, M. (1964) *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, Methuen, London.
- Eleftheriou, K. (2015) 'Η Ελληνική αριστερά και η κρίση (2010-2015) όψεις μίας μεγάλης ανατροπής', *Synchrone Themata*, vol. 130-131, [The Greek left and the crisis (2010-2015): aspects of a great overturn].
- Hay, C. (2009) 'King Canute and the 'problem' of structure and agency: On times, tides and heresthetics', *Political Studies*, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 260–279.
- Karyotis, G., Pamphilis, N. & Rüdig, W. (2016) 'The end of TINA? Emotions, framing contests and electoral choices in the 'age of austerity'', paper presented at the Political Studies Association 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, 21 March 2016, Brighton, UK.
- Katsambekis, G. (2015) 'ΣΥΡΙΖΑ 2004-2012: Από τη «νεολαία» στον «λαό». Μια λογοθεωρητική προσέγγιση του λαϊκισμού της ριζοσπαστικής αριστεράς', [SYRIZA 2004-2012. 'From 'youth' to 'the people'. A discourse theoretical approach to the populism of the radical left'], In *Θεωρία του Λόγου. Δημιουργικές Εφαρμογές*, [Discourse Theory: Creative Applications], eds Kioupoklis, A., Kosma, Y. & Pehtelidis, G., Gutenberg, Athens.
- Katsanidou, A. & Otjäs, S. (2016) 'How the European debt crisis reshaped national political space: The case of Greece', *European Union Politics*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 262-284.
- Keating, M. & McCrone, D. (eds) (2013) *The Crisis of Social Democracy in Europe*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.
- Keith, D. & March, L. (2015) 'Why is there no successful radical left in Britain?' Unpublished Manuscript.
- Kitschelt, H. (1988) 'Left-libertarian parties: explaining innovation in competitive party systems', *World Politics*, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 194–234.
- Koltsida, D. (2013) 'Η Κοινοβουλευτική Ομάδα του ΣΥΡΙΖΑ μετά τις διπλές εκλογές του 2012', MA Thesis, University of Athens, [SYRIZA's Parliamentary Group after the dual elections of 2012].

- Kriesi, H. (2014) 'The populist challenge', *West European Politics*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 361-378.
- Lijphart, A. (1994) *Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Study of Twenty-seven Democracies, 1945–1990*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Loulis, G. (2012) *Πού Οδηγείται η Ελλάδα. Η Χρεωκοπία του Κομματικού Συστήματος*, [Where Greece is Headed. The Bankruptcy of the Party System], Kastaniotis, Athens.
- March, L. and C. Mudde (2005) 'What's left of the radical left? The European radical left after 1989: decline and mutation', *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 23–49.
- March, L. and Rommerskirchen, C. (2015) 'Out of left field? Explaining the variable electoral success of European radical left parties', *Party Politics*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 40–53.
- Massetti, E. & Schakel, A. H. (2013) 'Ideology matters: why decentralisation has a differentiated effect on regionalist parties' fortunes in Western democracies', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 52, pp. 797–821.
- Mavris, Y. (2012) 'Greece's austerity election', *New Left Review*, vol. 76, pp. 95-107.
- Mazower, M. (2001) *Inside Hitler's Greece. The Experience of Occupation, 1941-1944*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Meguid, B. M. (2005) 'Competition between unequals: the role of mainstream party strategy in niche party success', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 99, no. 3, pp. 347-359.
- McLean, I. (2002) 'William H. Riker and the invention of heresthetic(s)', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 535-558.
- Moschonas, G. (2015) 'Κρίσιμες εκλογές και η ερμηνεία των εκλογών του Σεπτεμβρίου 2015', *Synchrone Themata*, vol. 130-131, ['Critical elections' and the interpretation of the September 2015 election].
- Mudde, C. (2004) 'The populist zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 39, pp. 542–563.
- Nicolacopoulos, E. & Martín, I. (2015) 'Syriza and the new party system in Greece', *The Economy Journal.com*, 9/4/2015, Available online at: <http://www.theeconomyjournal.com/en/notices/2015/04/syriza-y-el-nuevo-sistema-de-partidos-en-grecia-091.php>.
- Norris, P. (2005) *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Olsen, J., Koss, M. & Hough, D. (eds) (2010) *Left Parties in National Governments*, Palgrave, Basingstoke.
- Panayiotakis, M. (2015) 'The radical left in Greece', *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 25-43.
- Panayotopoulos, P. (2012) 'Πολιτικές χρήσεις της Ιστορίας 2010-2012. Ριζοσπαστική αριστερά και εξωτερική νοηματοδότηση του τραύματος' [Political uses of History 2010–

2012. Radical left and extraneous meaning of the trauma], in eds Demertzis, N., Antoniou, G. & Paschaloudi, E., *Εμφύλιος Πόλεμος–Πολιτιστικό Τραύμα* [Civil War–Cultural Trauma], Alexandria, Athens.
- Pappas, S. T. (2013) 'Why Greece failed', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 31-45.
- Pedersen, M. N. (1982) 'Towards a new typology of party lifespans and minor parties' *Scandinavian Political Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 1-16.
- Riker, W. H. (1986) *The Art of Political Manipulation*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Rüdig, W., and Karyotis, G. (2014) 'Who protests in Greece? Mass opposition to austerity'. *British Journal of Political Science*, 44(3), pp. 487-513.
- Samaras, A. (2010) Speech in the Greek Parliament, minutes of plenary session PIE, 6 May, available online at: <http://www.vouli.gr>
- Sartori, G. (1976) *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Serricchio, F., Tsakatika, M. & Quaglia, L. (2013) 'Euroscepticism and the global financial crisis', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 51-64.
- Shepsle, K. A. (2003) 'Losers in politics (and how they sometimes become winners): Riker's heresthetic', *Perspectives on Politics*, vol.1, no. 2, pp. 307–315.
- Sotirakopoulos, N. & Sotiropoulos, G. (2013) 'Direct democracy now!': The Greek Indignados and the present cycle of struggles', *Current Sociology*, vol. 61, no. 4, pp. 443-456.
- Spourdalakis, M. (2013) 'Left Strategy in the Greek cauldron. Explaining SYRIZA's success', *Socialist Register*, vol. 49, pp. 98-119.
- Stavrakakis, Y. & Katsambekis, G. (2014) 'Left-wing populism in the European periphery: the case of SYRIZA', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 119-142.
- SYN (2001) Press conference of representatives of the Space for Dialogue and Common Action of the Left, 15.5.2001, Available at: [www.syn.gr/gr/keimeno.php?id=2664](http://www.syn.gr/gr/keimeno.php?id=2664)
- SYN (2009) *Για την Αριστερά του 21<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα*, [For the Left of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century], at <http://www.syn.gr>
- SYRIZA (2014) *The Thessaloniki Programme*, at <http://www.syriza.gr/article/id/59907/SYRIZA---THE-THESSALONIKI-PROGRAMME.html#.VsysVPmLSUK>
- Taggart, P. (1998) 'A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems', *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 363-388.

- Teperoglou, E. & Tsatsanis, E. (2014) 'Dealignment, de-legitimation and the implosion of the two-party system in Greece: the earthquake election of 6 May 2012', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, vol. 24, no.2, pp. 222-242.
- Theodorakis, S. (2016) Speech at the Attica Congress of The River, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2016, at: <http://topotami.gr/tis-exelixeis-sto-rizospastiko-stratopedo-kentroo-stratopedo-tha-tis-kathorisoume-emeis/>
- Tsakatika, M. (2009) 'Από το 'κριτικό ναι' στο φιλοευρωπαϊκό όχι. Τί έχει αλλάξει στον Ευρωπαϊκό προσανατολισμό του Συνασπισμού;' [The Greek Coalition of the Left: turning Eurosceptic?], *Diethnis kai Evropaiiki Politiki*, vol. 13–14, pp. 143–161.
- Tsakatika, M. & Eleftheriou, C. (2013) 'The radical left's turn towards civil society in Greece: one strategy, two paths', *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 81-99.
- Tsakatika, M. & Lisi, M. (2013) 'Zippin' up by boots, goin' back to my roots', *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 18, no.1, pp. 1-19.
- Tsakatika, M. (2014) 'SYRIZA y la izquierda en la política griega'. In: Martín, I. and Tirado, I. (eds.) *Grecia: Aspectos Políticos y Juridico-economicos de la Crisis*. CEPS: Madrid.
- Tsakatika, M., Graziano, P. & Font, N. (2015) 'The emergence of new forms of populisms? Evidence from Southern Europe', paper presented at the ECPR General Conference 2015, Montreal, 26-29 August.
- Tsipras, A. (2011) 'Τσίπρας: Ωμή αλλοίωση λαϊκής κυριαρχίας' [A blatant distortion of popular sovereignty], *Ethnos*, 10 November.
- Tsipras, A. (2012a) Speech in the Greek Parliament, minutes of plenary session ΞΘ, 11 November, available online at: <http://www.vouli.gr>.
- Tsipras, A. (2012b) 'SYRIZA's positions on economic reconstruction', speech in Alexandroupoli, 12 June.
- Tsipras, A. (2014) Speech at the central election rally before the 2014 European elections, Athens, Omonoia Square, 22 May.
- Tsirbas, Y. (2015) 'The January 2015 parliamentary election in Greece: government change, partial punishment and hesitant stabilisation', *South European Society and Politics*, DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2015.1088428
- Vaiou, D., & Kalandides, A. (2016) 'Practices of collective action and solidarity: reconfigurations of the public space in crisis-ridden Athens, Greece', *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, vol. 31, no. 3., pp. 457-470.
- Verney, S. (2012) 'The Eurozone's first post-bailout election: the 2010 local government contest in Greece', *South European Society and Politics*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 195-216.
- Voulgaris, Y. & Nicolakopoulos, E. (eds) (2014) *2012. Ο Διπλός Εκλογικός Σεισμός*, [2012. The Double Electoral Earthquake], Themelio, Athens.

Webb, P. (2005) 'The continuing advance of the minor parties', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 58, no. 4, pp. 757-775.

### **Interviews**

Interview 1: member of SYRIZA political secretariat, Athens 23 May 2016

Interview 2: senior SYRIZA cadre, public opinion researcher, Athens 26 May 2016

Interview 3: senior member of cabinet, Athens 26 May 2016

Interview 4: SYRIZA communications strategist, Athens 27 May 2016